

Sir Charlton Richards' Last Kiss

The outward signs we all may see,
The hidden springs we may not know.

—John Greenleaf Whittier



William, William Hall

With best wishes and the compliments of the season,



Christmas
1916

Brookside, Great Barrington
Massachusetts

PS352.5
.A542 S5
1916

Copyright, 1916, by
WILLIAM HALL WALKER



✓
©CLA448308

DEC 15 1916

220 1

Sir Charlton Richards' Last Kiss



MASTER CHARLTON RICHARDS was graduated by Balliol at the end of the Term, and the records of Balliol show that he was not particularly proficient in any of his studies. He was first in the Balliol cricket team, which for three consecutive terms had beaten everything at Oxford, and the same records show that these extraordinary victories were entirely due to his batting and his fielding. Charlton also was mainly the immediate cause of Balliol's winning three successive races at Henley, where he was stroke oar, and while he fainted on all occasions after these hard-earned races, he was carried to the Balliol boathouse on the shoulders of his exhausted crew and serenaded the same night.

Master Charlton, when graduated, was within three days of his twentieth birthday, a well-knitted, huge-framed giant, his manly face crowned by a fine square forehead over which fell a profusion of blond hair.

The Richards family were of old Devonshire stock, dating back some two hundred years, and "Burke's Peerage" testifies to the fact that no member of the family had ever sullied the race by any act of discourtesy or dishonor.

Sir Evelyn Richards was deeply mortified at his son's failure to take "honours," and furthermore did not mince matters by silence at home. No evidence of this state of affairs ever leaked out, as

that would be contrary to good form, and so the world was never the wiser.

Young Charlton continued his open-air athletic habits, riding to hounds, fishing, driving, cricketing, and travelling. No one knew better the Bay of Naples, where he kept his yacht, upon which he spent the better part of every winter. Algeria, Tunis, Biskra and Sicily were as familiar to Charlton as his Piccadilly. He would take his pipe, and with a biscuit in his pocket, loll away entire days on the slopes of Vesuvius, and no goat-track was too steep or rough for him.

One day he was reclining on a grassy hillock, smoking and musing, when there came up the path a goat with its tinkling bell, and after the goat a little bare-legged brown-faced girl. The child gazed at Charlton with big-eyed wonder. Never had she seen a man with blond hair, and such a monstrous creature, too. Charlton saw her, but seemed not to be aware of her presence; so, shyly, the child approached him out of curiosity, and finally sat near him, still gazing fixedly into Charlton's eyes. Finally, she came nearer, and said in Neapolitan, "Why does Signor come here?" Charlton did not reply, but as she came still nearer he was impelled to rebuff her, and had actually opened his mouth to send her about her business when he noticed for the first time her beauty.

"What is your name?" he asked her. "Pipita," she replied. "Where do you live?" The child turned slightly to the right and said, "Down there." "Down there! Where?" "Why, just down there in the hollow." "What are you doing here?" Charlton asked. "Tending Grippa." "Who's Grippa?" asked Charlton. "Why, there she is," pointing to the goat. "Oh, yes—ah, um—yes, yes, I see. But why are you alone?" "Alone! Why not? There's Grippa. Grippa and I are always here. I like the silence, and Grippa likes the grass." "Oh, I see—yes! You tend Grippa, and Grippa tends

you." "Yes, Grippa and I are very good friends." Then, coming nearer, Pipita seated herself close to Charlton, and noticing his fob chain, said, "What's that?" "What's what?" said Charlton. "Why, that shiny thing there," pointing to the chain. "Ha! ha! You little woman! Just like all the rest of your sex—always attracted by anything that glitters." The child seated herself close to Charlton, nestling, with her pretty head against his breast, and toyed with his fob. Charlton's back was supported against a broken column of African marble. The day was warm and the sun was slowly sinking in the west, the waters of the bay barely moved by the sultry breeze. The thin blue Vesuvian smoke floated lazily toward Capri, which, glowing in the red rays, was a ruby set in blue.

Away to the left Sorrento basked in the evening's glow, and to the right, over the promontory of Posilippo was fair Ischia, like a sapphire in a golden haze. Charlton succumbed to the beauty and the heat, and, resting his head against the column, slept; and the child too, her head on Charlton's breast, and the fob still in her hand, slept also, and Grippa stretched herself on the sod, and all three, Charlton, Pipita and the goat, were in dreamland.

When Charlton awakened the sun had sunk into another day and the stars were in the vault above him. The circle of the great bay glistened with a thousand lights, and a great ship was putting out to sea—to India or Japan!

Charlton rubbed his eyes, trying to remember where he could be, and why the child was so near him; but when he saw Grippa, who had begun to munch the dry grass again, he remembered all about it, and was troubled as to what he should do with Pipita. Finally the child opened her great dark eyes and said, "Does Signor live in Naples?" "No." "Where does Signor live?" "Oh, ah—in England." "England! Where's England? I know all the places around

here, and I never heard of England." "Oh, England is far, very far from here. It would take you many weeks to walk to England." "Is England beautiful?" asked the child. "Hum, ah—well that depends upon the time of year one visits England." "Does the sun shine in England, Signor?" "Um—well, perhaps, sometimes; that is, in summer." "What a funny place England must be," said Pipita. "The sun always shines here. Are all the men like you in England?" "Hardly, at least few. Why do you ask such silly questions?" growled Charlton. "Why should they be like me?" "Because," said Pipita, "if they are, I want to go to England."

Charlton rose with a jump, and Pipita rolled over into a hole, the frightened child cowering before the angry man, who the moment before had been smiling into her eyes, and then she rose and, stumbling over a rock, fell to the ground with a cry of pain.

Charlton seemed to care nothing about the child. Why should he have any interest in this Neapolitan brat, with her bare legs and ragged frock? But finally he walked over to her, leisurely, with his two hands in his breeches pockets, and said, "Are you hurt?" "Yes, yes. Oh, my ankle! I cannot walk." "Here's a pretty kettle of fish," mumbled Charlton. "What the devil shall I do with the brat? I can't leave her here all night. Serves me right for permitting her to hang about me," and he leisurely filled his pipe, and then, with his flint, lighted it. And musing, he said, "Where did you say you lived?" "There," said the child. "Don't you see it?" "See what, you silly? I see nothing but that pile of rocks." "Yes, but there's where we live." "*We, we*, you booby, who's *we*? Answer me *at once*." "Why, Father and Mother and Grippa and me."

Charlton's huge jaw dropped. "Here," he said, "I suppose I must take you home, you bag of rags. Hang me if I ever come here

again." And he then picked up the frightened child as if she were a bundle of hay, and the big Englishman walked down the slope with Grippa trotting after him still chewing her cud.

When Charlton came to the pile of rocks, he saw no one; but as a thin blue smoke came from a cleft between two rocks he assumed that someone was inside, so he stopped at the hole which served as entrance and shouted:

"Hey, there, you! Come here, and be quick with you."

A dark and wrinkled woman, with a low forehead and black, dry hair hanging about her shoulders, appeared. She held in her left hand a blackened earthen pot, and in her right a bit of wooden stick with which she had been coaxing her evening fire. When she saw Charlton she drew back into the hole and called in a high, staccato voice: "Alfredo! Alfredo! Here! Here, quick, quick! There's a man here." Then, peering through a cleft of the rocks, there was a fierce eye studying Charlton, and a wrinkled and dirty hand grasping a short but very sharp knife. Charlton spoke fairly good Neapolitan, as he had been coming to Naples for many years and had many friends down below on the *marina*. Many an hour had Charlton spent with some dusky boatman, listening to some legend of the Camorra, some feud which neither time nor circumstance nor wealth nor poverty could assuage, until one night it was all paid for by a dead and bleeding corpse up a dark and fetid alley. So Charlton had no difficulty in making Alfredo understand that he had found Pipita on the hillside above and had brought her home with a sprained ankle. Immediately a great and total change came over Alfredo's swarthy face. He stuck his knife into its sheath with a bang, and came running to Charlton's side. He grasped Pipita tenderly and tearfully in his bare arms, and dropping upon his knees, he raised his tearful face toward Heaven and cried:

"Holy Virgin! Mother of Jesus! Christ Almighty! Thou who knowest the hearts of men, see thy servant and this thy child, helpless and forlorn. Forgive her, I pray thee, all her sins; grant her thy Holy Spirit, bring her back again to health and strength that she may, by her daily acts of mercy, soften the sorrows of this wicked world, and, laying down her burden at last, enter into thy Heavenly Kingdom."

As Alfredo ended, his head was bowed into the hillside dust, his body was quivering with emotion, and his tears were falling over the face of his prostrate child.

Charlton stood transfixed. Alfredo's change from suspicious hate and vengeful, red-eyed threatening was, even to him, accustomed as he was to Neapolitans and their ways, a matter for surprise. But as he stood there thinking, Alfredo called: "Grattana! Grattana! Here, you slut! Come here, or, by the Virgin, I'll brain you. Here, you rotten flirt, give me that apron of yours. Go away! Don't you dare to touch her, or I'll knife you into shreds, you lazy soul."

So Grattana tore off her dirty apron, and Alfredo, with his knife, slit it into ribbons and wound them about Pipita's ankle.

Neapolitans, especially, are quick to take offence. They will wait without any external evidence of hatred for their opportunity to settle a grudge which would have been forgotten in ten minutes in England. Some night, years, perhaps many years, after, you feel a quick sharp pain between your shoulder and your spine, and it's all up with you. You are bleeding to death, and around the corner there, a stealthy, swarthy face grins with glistening teeth. Grappo is happy now. Somewhere, there will be a very large *fiasco* of Chianti opened to-night, and four men will lift their glasses to each other. Nothing will be said, the wine will be drunk in silence;

but these four men look steadily into each's eyes, and they understand.

"So! So Signor brought Pipita home, did he? Signor will honor us by accepting our simple meal. Here, you lazy fool! Grattana, I say, get that *rissotto* quick. Signor will sup here. Go on, you . . ."

Charlton forgot all about Tunis, where he had promised to be on the morrow for a week's shooting, and he ate his supper with a wooden spoon, holding Pipita on his knee, while Grippa the goat sniffed about for scraps. Indeed, no scraps are ever in *any* Neapolitan home—*never*.

Then they all slept on the earthen floor, except Charlton, who had been given the only suggestion for a bed, which was a pile of musty straw in the corner not more than three feet from the fireplace, which was only a recess of rough stones. When Charlton looked up from his fetid mass of straw he saw through an opening in the roof the constellation of the Pleiades floating by, reminding him of a theorem in geometry which old Professor Hughes had used to impress something on his mind, and how the old gentleman used the Pleiades and some star to illustrate his theorem. So he fell asleep. With all the vague things which in dreamland float before us, Charlton saw two things with an intensity that no lapse of time or circumstance could ever efface—one, a crafty, vengeful face, and the man with that face turned at once into a suppliant angel. But last, and always last, and last again, a child nestling in his arms, and fast asleep.

Morning came, and morning in Italy—well, if you have never seen it, how can you sense it? Did you ever look over the plain around Perugia while the sun came over the hills beyond? Ah! the memory of it, the thought of it, thrills me, even after these twenty years. So Charlton, stooping, came out into the morning

air at dawn to clear his lungs. The sun was still below the eastern skyline, even from his elevated position fully two thousand feet above the *molo* at Naples.

The waters reflected the blue vault above. Over beyond Sorrento was a rosy hue, more pink than rose—or, was it more rose than pink?—which, slightly reflected by the surface of the sea, made a picture so beautiful, so subtle, so delicate, that the iridescence of the pearl would seem crude and coarse by comparison. If Velasquez could have seen it, it would have stirred his pulse, but Charlton was not Velasquez, and had often wondered why his father persisted in keeping three of Velasquez's paintings hanging in the library of Bellington Hall, when Charlton knew for a fact that he had been offered enough for them to lift a mortgage of twenty years' standing.

Hearing a voice, Charlton turned and saw Alfredo so very near him that he instinctively jumped away fully five feet. Alfredo smiled. "Signor will have coffee?" "Yes," said Charlton. "I must be off at once. I was to be in Tunis this morning to meet a friend." "Tunis, where is that? Tunis! I never heard of Tunis. Where's Tunis?" "Over there," said Charlton, pointing over the sea with his thumb. "Ah—ah! I've never been away from Naples, and I never want to." "Don't you like to travel?" said Charlton. "No, no—never. Look, only look at that—at that," said Alfredo, pointing toward the sun just peeping over Sorrento, gilding the entire Bay of Naples with its oblique light, while the shadow caused by the Sorrento cliffs was a deep sapphire blue. "Where—where, Signor, does the sun come like that? Why go to Tunis? Stay with us. Signor is welcome, always welcome, and Grattana will make you the sweetest spaghetti. Ah, she is a cook! Grippa will give you milk, and Pipita—well, Pipita may love you. This way, Signor. Coffee is served."

After coffee, Charlton was about to start down the mountain side to rejoin his yacht, and he had passed out of the hole which served as doorway when he heard Pipita say, "Does not Signor care for Pipita?" Charlton turned into the hut again, and there, in the dim light, he saw Pipita, her bronzed face bathed with tears. "What are you blubbering about?" said Charlton. "Are you still in pain?" "Oh," said Pipita, "I don't care for that." "Then what are you crying for, you silly. Only fools cry." "Then I'm a fool, am I?" cried Pipita. "Yes, a fool, a silly goose, a—oh, hang it all, what's the use of talking to an Italian brat like this?" Pipita sat upon the bundle of straw, her eyes were dry now, and her dark cheeks were aflame—yes, scarlet, white, blue and green. "You! You! You! Were *you* going to leave me without saying good-bye? You beastly creature! May the snakes bite you, may the scorpions sting you, may the lightnings blight you." Charlton stood petrified. Could his ears deceive him? Had he mistaken Pipita for a child? Was she older than he thought? He glanced at her breast, which was exposed, Italian fashion, to within a few inches of her waist, and saw at once his mistake. Pipita was a woman. "So Signor—so—so Signor was to leave Pipita. Out of this, you brute—you coward! May Satan have you, body and soul." Now Charlton, for all his brusque outside, was within a gentleman, and centuries of careful breeding had done its work. He felt touched—yes, touched—this great hulk of bone and sinew, this brave, tough athlete who could row until he fainted dead away before he would allow Magdalen to win at Henley. Why, it was a tradition at Bel-lington Hall, that, seeing a farmer's child attacked by a bull in an adjoining field, throwing the reins to his groom, he jumped from his trap when his horse was doing his twenty miles an hour, vaulted over the hurdle fence into the field, pushed the child through a space between the hurdles, then, grasping the bull by the horns,

threw him, and then vaulted into the road himself, and lighting his pipe drove down to the village as if nothing had happened, as cool as a cucumber. When his father heard of this child-bull episode he asked Charlton about it, but Charlton replied, "Nonsense, that's nothing."

So Charlton was touched, and knowing that he was face to face with a woman, he walked over to her and held out his hand. Pipita, somewhat softened, eyed him closely and said nothing. Finally Charlton said, "Can't we be friends again? I'm going away. I may never see you again." Pipita burst into tears and sobbed as if her heart were breaking. "You! You! Leave me *forever!* Holy Virgin!" and she swooned.

Charlton, his manhood finally on the surface, lifted her gently and folded her in his brawny arms. "Pipita, Pipita dear! Never mind, child. Here I am, my little sweet, right around you, and you are safe." Pipita opened her eyes slowly, and seemed to be utterly at a loss to understand the situation, but when she did, she threw her two arms about Charlton's neck, pressing her face to his. Her brown breasts lay against his bosom, and her tears drenched his clothes.

Charlton held her away from him by both hands, that he might have a last good look at her loveliness, drew her very slowly toward him, kissed her first on one cheek and then on the other, and then full on her two lips—a long, long kiss—and then he laid her down on the straw and bolted out of the hut as if he were being chased by a mastiff.

Charlton never forgot that kiss. Many a night, when he slept on the sand beside the Temple of Luxor, or among the snows of the Himalayas, those warm lips pressed his, those budding breasts were cushioned against his bosom, that flexible, willowy body clung to him, and those tears coursed down his cheeks.

Before he left the rocks he ascertained Alfredo's family name, and the first thing he did when he reached Naples was to visit the Banco di Napoli and arrange that the sum of five pounds sterling should be paid over to Alfredo every quarter, that Pipita was to have four new frocks of her own selection, one every three months, and also any ornament to the extent of twenty pounds a year. Grattana, too, was remembered. She was to have a new frock every feast of San Gennaro, and a string of beads and a rosary every six months. Grippa was not forgotten either, for she had a new bell at once and a bundle of carrots weekly. So Charlton sailed for Tunis that night.

The next summer, one day in June, when the birds had come back from Africa to England, and the distant hills wore their chiffon veils, when the roses and the daffodils and narcissi were in bloom, Charlton drove up the long drive of the ancient seat of the Bellingtons, and old Sillington, the butler, with tears in his eyes welcomed him home again as "Master Charlton."

His father's valet soon put Charlton's room to rights, for this room was always kept ready for his return, and this time had been aired for two years since he was there last.

Sir Evelyn never came down to coffee. As a young man he had lived for many years in Paris, and his manner and way of living was more Continental than English. But when Sillington took his coffee in to him and told him that Master Charlton was downstairs, he pushed old Sillington and his coffee aside, and grabbing his two sticks, gout or no gout, he was going to breakfast with the beggar. So down he hobbled by the grand staircase, with his red-velvet dressing-gown and his brocaded smoking cap, and so, straight up to Charlton, as if he were to put him out of the house. "So—so, you vagabond, you braggart, you vulgar denison of hotels and restau-

rants, you thought that you would like a cut off the joint, did you? Tired of ragouts and curries, of soufflés and patés, and all those miserable abominations! Aha! Ha, ha! I thought you would come trailing up the drive some day thirsty for a glass of Bass. Ah, I say, speaking of Bass"—and Sir Evelyn came very near and whispering, for fear Sillington might hear him—"I say, you silly, eh! Have you been to Voison's lately?" "Yes," answered Charlton, "I dined there last night." "Dined there last *night*," said Sir Evelyn; "dined there last *night*!" and the old gentleman drew the back of his velvet dressing-gown sleeve across his mouth, and gazed intently into his son's eyes. "I say, boy, listen! Did you have a bottle of that Château Lafitte—eh?" Charlton nodded in the affirmative. Sir Evelyn groaned, and hobbled out of the room and into the dining-room, where he seated himself at table.

So they breakfasted together, the father and the braggart, and, to celebrate the occasion, old Sillington decanted a bottle of Sir Evelyn's choicest port and, placing the decanter at Sir Evelyn's right hand, took his usual place behind him. Sir Evelyn absently poured out a glass, then holding it to the light, and sniffing it, turned scarlet. Then looking over his shoulder, he said, very quietly, unusually low for him, "Sillington, you must be ill." "Me! Oh no, Sir Evelyn; I'm not ill." "But—but—why, bless my soul, Sillington, you're getting dotty." "I hope not, Sir Evelyn." "God bless me, he *is* dotty. Port! Port, man—port for *breakfast*! Who ever heard of such a thing? Call the doctor." "Why, Sir Evelyn, it's like this. Sir Evelyn, may it please you, I thought you would like to drink to Master Charlton's return." Sir Evelyn became livid. "But, damn me, who ever heard of port for *breakfast*?" Then, pouring out a glass, he said: "Here, you beggar—here's to you, and I hope you will have a happy marriage." Charlton had his glass in his hand, but he started as if he had been cuffed (and no

one could cuff with impunity Master Charlton Richards) and spilled the entire glass of wine over the cloth. "Sir, may I ask what it was you said a—a—about a happy marriage?" Sir Evelyn frowned. "You young sprig, do you suppose that you are to stay around here—a bachelor?"

Charlton rose from the table and walked three times around the table, while Sir Evelyn sipped his coffee and glanced quizzically at Sillington. Sir Evelyn cut a second wing of pheasant and a bit of Yorkshire ham, neither of which he had touched at breakfast in forty years, any more than he was in the habit of drinking port for breakfast. Charlton was in a blue flunk, and as he paced the floor and hung his head, he said to himself: "Marriage, marriage! Did the Governor really mean I was to marry?" Absurd! He was having his little joke. The port, the joke, and the pheasant and the Yorkshire ham were all rank nonsense. And yet, from what Charlton knew of his father, there was no likelihood of his changing his mind for anybody. At least, he never was known to pay the slightest attention to her Ladyship's wishes when she was living.

Finally Charlton ceased his pacing, and after filling his glass again with port, lifted it slowly, and looking fixedly into his pater's eyes over his glass as he drank it: "Well, Governor, I think I'll take a turn about the kennels and see the dogs. By the way, how is old Folly?" "Folly! Old Folly! Why, Folly's dead. She died only one week after you sailed for Gibraltar two years ago last September." "*Dead!* Old Folly dead!" Charlton paused and buried his face in his two hands and groaned. One of the thoughts he had in his mind the evening before at Voison's was that on the morrow he and old Folly would have a good tramp, and perhaps raise a bird or two. And now, dear old Folly gone—gone—gone! Suddenly he straightened up and walked straight to the decanter

and poured out two glasses of port, one for his father and one for himself, and just then he looked at Sillington, who was getting out another glass and fumbling with it in a peculiar way.

"Well, Sillington, what is it? Speak up, man." "May it please you and Master Charlton—may I drink this toast with you?" Sir Evelyn half-turned in his chair. He was evidently suspicious that Sillington was still dipsy. Then, turning to Charlton, he saw him raise his glass, and still not knowing what it was all about, he raised his own, and Sillington filled his glass and raised it also. Charlton said: "To old Folly, God bless her!" Not another word was spoken. Charlton went out of the room. Sir Evelyn, after a moment, went into the library, and Sillington cleared off the table together with the port-stained cloth.

"So the Governor has made up his mind, and it's all up with me. No more yachting, no more dahabeahs on the Nile. No more Biskra, or shooting on the Yang-tse. What rubbish these women are! Why were women made, anyway? They know nothing about man or his needs, and I never saw one yet who dared to talk of the many subjects which a man would deal with quietly and logically, without flying the track as soon as ever the trend of argument approaches a conclusion. Off she goes, for all the world like Phillip. By the way, I wonder if Phillip is living. I have straddled many animals, but never one like Phillip. She would be going along like a kitten, when she would sidestep into the hedge—all over a drifting leaf. It was never safe to ride her after the leaves began to fall. Then the women! They are, besides illogical, as they call it, 'temperamental!' If anyone knows what that is, I don't. If a woman can't keep to one way of thinking five minutes, if she looks and acts like an angel one minute and like a fury the next, she says she's 'temperamental,' which is as good a term as any to describe an utterly impossible proposition. And so I'm to be tied up to

such a thing for life, compelled for courtesy's sake to consider her every wish, to ride with her in Rotten Row, to sit opposite her at—dinner. To lift my glass to her every evening, when there are ducks in China, cranes up the Nile, tigers in India and prairie hens in Dakota, all waiting to be shot!"

The great oaks were just as he had left them—the oaks of his grandfathers and his childhood's old friends, and he leaned his great frame against one, and placing his cheek against the rugged bark, wept like a child.

"Oh, Pipita! Pipita! Father, have mercy, have mercy!"

The Lady Philippa was the only unmarried daughter of Sir Reginald Percy, and his seat was also in Devonshire, but a few miles away, so Charlton had not long to wait to find out who was to be his bride. For the third day, after the breakfast with the port, Sir Reginald and his daughter, the Lady Philippa, drove over in their landau and spent two weeks at the Hall, and arranged all the settlements.

The Lady Philippa was not tall, her complexion, somewhat dark, her hair tending toward black, and slightly streaked here and there with whitening hair. She dressed this hair somewhat low about her forehead, which gave the face the appearance of an oval. Her eyes were a deep chestnut brown, tending toward black, the brown only visible when the sun shone directly into them, and the observer's were shaded. The eyelashes were black and upturned, and the general effect was almost almond-shaped. Her face at rest was a study, and suggested some poignant grief. Her voice was remarkable, a fine rich contralto, never rising above a middle note even under intense excitement, and when she became interested the *tout ensemble* was that of a Madonna. If deeply moved, her whole frame would bend towards you, her hands clasped and resting upon

her lap; the cadence of her voice thrilled you, roused you, impelled your strict attention; the eyes would glow as if lighted by some hidden fire. Her French was perfect, and an echo of some salon of Tours. Charlton had heard somewhere that she was born in Roumania and of course that was enough to disgust him. In fact, she suggested a lovely, radiant, blossoming Roumanian valley under the first light snow of the coming winter. Charlton certainly was not burdened with any superfluous imagination, but years after they were married he called her Carpathia, much to her delight.

When the Lady Philippa first saw Charlton's huge frame and somewhat distant manner, she shrank as if she had received a blow; and naturally this shyness raised Charlton's ire, and he had great difficulty in concealing it. But good breeding produces wonderful results, and, as the saying is, "Blood will tell," especially if there is a woman in the case. So Charlton settled down to his wooing.

At first he made very little progress, but gradually he discovered that she had a lot of good "horse sense," as he called it, about many things, and, what was more, a mind of her own and not afraid to contest matters with anybody. Charlton had never met a woman like this before, who, as he said, could talk without gloves about politics, religion, theology, sociology, marriage, birth control, children, education, the rights of wives, and the rights of husbands too. She quoted both Latin and Greek authorities with equal facility—in Latin, Greek or English. Plato, Aristotle, or Marcus Aurelius were all the same to her. She claimed that no man should ever enter his wife's room by day or night without his wife's express permission. She asserted that the ethics of the ancient Greeks were infinitely finer, nobler and more uplifting than any subsequent schemes of morals or philosophy.

Charlton was dumfounded and utterly confused, it was all so

very strange, and he frequently made some excuse to leave the room for a few moments to collect his thoughts. So, as a matter of course, he in time became interested in her, and found himself seeking her, first in the breakfast room, then in the library, then in the gardens, and then, wonder of wonders, he began picking flowers for her. One rainy day they were walking down in the meadow, and he had picked some buttercups, and had, owing to his sailor's knowledge of knots, made a rather pretty wreath for her hair. Then her shoe-lace became untied. Now, the land down there is always wet, but this rainy day it was a bog. No one but two web-footed English people would ever think of being there. But down went Charlton with both knees into the ooze, and after tying her lace, he rose and bowed somewhat stiffly; but the Lady Philippa had a peculiar expression, and a light in her eyes that Charlton had never seen before.

Philippa wore the buttercup wreath down to dinner, and with a black gown and with her black hair she looked charming.

The next morning Charlton was down very early, and seemed to be restless. He thought coffee was late, and snapped at Sillington, when, as a matter of fact, it was exactly prompt, as Sillington always was. Then he fussed because the Lady Philippa was late, when the fact was, she was waiting for him at her seat at the table. Then he followed her out into the old rose-garden, and walking up to her and bracing himself squarely before her, after picking a rose, he held it toward her, saying brusquely, "Will you have me?" "Have you, you—I don't understand you." And he looked bigger than ever; but the blue eyes never quailed, and he said again: "Look here now! Don't you know I'm serious? Will you marry me? Have me—marry me—don't you know?" Then the little woman looked down and colored, and was silent. But Charlton was not the man to accept silence as his answer, and he advanced and

offered her his rose, and as she took it she looked up into his eyes, and before Charlton knew it he had her in his big arms and was kissing her. Then he remembered Pipita's kiss again—yes, Pipita's.

It is forty years since Charlton made the buttercup wreath for the lady now known as Lady Richards of Bellington Hall, and there were at this time not less than five children living by that marriage—all married and with children, but one—the last. Nothing pleased Sir Charlton Richards, as he was now, more than to have them all about him, for he was absent from England much of his time on affairs of state, as he was not only a Privy Councillor, but had been Ambassador at St. Petersburg, Paris, Vienna, and Viceroy of India.

It was Christmas Eve, and the old Hall had been trimmed with mistletoe and evergreens and holly. Huge fires were burning in all three reception rooms, and Sillington (2nd) had closed the dining-room to keep the children out while he laid the cloth. There was dancing, for the music was from London, and Sir Charlton had three times waltzed with his youngest granddaughter, Mildred, besides joining in a Sir Roger de Coverley, and feeling somewhat tired, for he was now well past seventy years of age, yet hale and hearty and a good shot, he strolled away into the library, where there was a fine yew-log burning with a flame five feet high, and drew his easy-chair near the hearth and was soon in the land of nod.

Again he saw the blue Vesuvian smoke drifting slowly over to Amalfi. Again Sorrento glittered in the setting sun like some turquoise flower in a sea of gold. Again fair Ischia's sapphire cliffs loomed out of the open sea, and a willowy form nestled close to him. Again he felt that long, warm kiss upon his lips.

When Sir Charlton's valet came in to help him to his room, Sir

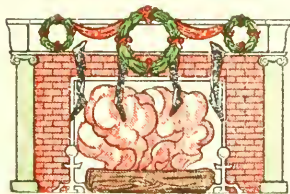
Charlton did not move. He seemed asleep, and fearing to awaken him, the valet waited beside the fire. Then Mildred came running into the room and shouted, "Oh, Grandpa! look at my dolly," and climbing into his lap tried to draw him to her for a kiss. The head came down, and Sir Charlton Richards received his last kiss—the sweetest kiss of all—the kiss of a little child.

W. H. W.

*When a feller goes a-huntin' for a rose
He shouldn't be a-thinkin' of the thorn;
He must woo it, he must win it—
Where his heart beats he must pin it,
An' breathe the breath that's in it
Every morn!*

*When a feller goes a-huntin' for a rose
He shouldn't see the thorn beneath its breast,
But for all its thorny foes,
Red and reckless,—one poor rose
Is sweet enough, God knows,
For the best.*

—Frank L. Stanton.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 018 360 478 8